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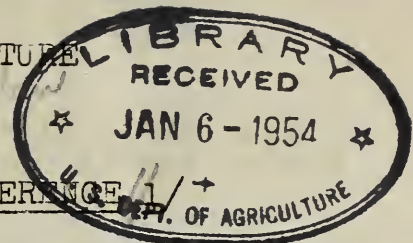


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3 SUGGESTIONS FROM STATES ON OUTLOOK CONFERENCE

The following suggestions which came from 23 States have been summarized as they pertain to (1) kinds of information, (2) presentation of material, (3) time of conference, (4) regional sessions, and (5) general comments. A series of statements on commendation is also included, which clearly and forcefully express the appreciation of the States for the service rendered to them by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and the Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics.

Commendations

My attendance last year has been of great value to me, and I hope that I will have the privilege of attending again.

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I was well pleased with the conference as a whole this year and thought the discussions were very good.

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I am writing to thank you and your associates for providing an excellent program at this year's outlook conference. I thought the conference was one of the best I have attended, especially in relation to allocation of time and topics.

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I have enjoyed and profited greatly by my experience in attending the outlook conference and I want to congratulate you folks on the fine work you are doing - also your constant effort to improve things and not just stand still and stand on your good record. Let's continue full speed ahead.

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Even though we prepare our outlook issue early we still feel it worth while to attend in order to get as much background information as possible and keep in touch with what our co-workers are doing.

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I thought the 1952 conference was very good and notice that a number of the suggestions made last year were incorporated into the program.

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As far as suggestions are concerned for improvement, I think that as the conference was held this past year there are very few improvements that could be made. Over all, I think the conference was well planned and the information presented met the needs of those attending.

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I like the outlook conference held in Washington, D. C. I think it builds esprit de corps on a national level.

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The program this year was one of the good ones since I have been attending. I was particularly pleased with those segments of the conference dealing with long-time outlook. We need more of this type of information.

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All of us, of course, realize the magnitude and the difficulties that you and your staff must deal with on outlook problems. If, at all times, all of us would try to continue following your approach - that of trying to discover how to make further improvements - opportunities would arise spontaneously. The services that you render in outlook work are so broad and comprehensive that all of us can choose to meet our own needs. This leads to but one conclusion - that excellent services are being rendered at present.

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In general, I feel that the outlook conference as it has been developed during the past several years is very satisfactory, and that both the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and the extension people are to be congratulated on the fine job they have done.

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In reply to your letter of December 10, 1952, regarding the annual outlook conference of 1952 and plans for 1953, may I state that I was particularly impressed with the procedure followed at the 1952 conference. I felt the program was well balanced, excellently handled, and I liked the conversational method used by most of the speakers in presenting their subjects.

I was not able to attend the 1951 conference but in comparing the 1952 program with previous years I believe it was considerably improved, and the information presented was directed toward helping meet our needs back home more so than in other years.

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In reply to your letter of December 10 regarding reactions to the annual outlook conference held in 1952 and also suggestions for this year's program; I would like to say that I was very much pleased with the 1952 program. I sincerely believe that the conference held this past fall was by far the best one that I have ever attended. The program was well rounded in that it covered the most appropriate subjects and dealt primarily with outlook rather than too many of the other phases of agricultural economics.

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I would like to say, first, that with each passing year I feel I have less in the way of suggestions on the conference. I think this is no doubt due to the fact that with more experience in the work I find



that the way you are handling the conference meets the general overall needs of most of those attending about as well as could be done.

I feel that the outlook conference is very valuable for individuals who are doing outlook work. I do not agree with the few who feel that we have outgrown the need for an outlook conference. I believe that it fills a real need and should by all means be continued.

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I would first like to say in reply to your letter of December 10 that I have always been very pleased with the outlook conferences which I have attended and on the whole I would say they very well meet our requirements. In fact, I have always been surprised how well the program has gone when you consider the wide variety of needs to be met in view of the wide geographical representation which participates in this meeting.

Once again I would like to say that I think you and all of your staff are to be complimented on the very excellent job of organization which is apparent to anyone participating in the outlook conference.

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In reply to your letter of December 10, 1952, I would like to express my thinking about the annual outlook conference and especially to say that so far as I am concerned I feel it is essential and certainly helpful in doing outlook work in this State.

#### Kinds of Information

I am interested in obtaining information on the intangible factors that influence economic activities. It is my opinion that the indicators used by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in forecasting economic conditions are preceded by intangible factors such as businessmen exercising more caution in increasing the size of their inventories, etc. ...

Since it is not feasible for the Bureau of Agricultural Economics to elaborate on these intangible factors, I do not think that the program for the annual outlook conference can be changed to any extent. I believe that if more of the specialists from various States would discuss the situations within their States more thoroughly during the discussions for each of the agricultural products, each of us would have a better picture of the conditions that exist in the United States. I also believe that some of the individuals in the Bureau of Agricultural Economics should be more receptive to some of the opinions of individuals who are employed outside of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics.

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It seems to me that the report series, once started by BAE, are slow to change. For example, in spite of the phenomenal growth of the broiler industry at various points throughout the United States, most of the statistical material and graphs pertaining to poultry outlook are about eggs. I am not suggesting that the information on egg production be minimized but I think it would be well to give some atten-



tion to hatchery outlets in discussing the outlook. Certainly BAE should provide more data on commercial broiler enterprises.

A similar situation exists with regard to soybeans. In spite of the growth of this crop and the industries associated with it, the outlook for soybeans is usually a paragraph or two under the general heading of fats and oils. I think it is time to start a separate report on soybeans as a crop.

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I was a little disappointed in the fact that those who presented outlook data did not take into consideration as much as I thought they should concerning regional developments and trends. It seems to me that if they could give more attention to this type of thing in their comments it would strengthen the general discussions a great deal. Of course, I realize that there is difficulty in doing this but I have been interested in knowing how the outlook stacks up for the eastern cotton belt as compared to the western cotton belt. Obviously, the boys in Washington have given this a great deal of thought and consideration and it seems to me that it would be valuable if they would bring into their discussions such comments.

Another example is the beef cattle situation. I would presume that the boys who study the beef cattle outlook have given a great deal of thought and consideration to the development of the cattle industry in the South and that they would have certain pertinent comments to make concerning this outlook as to regions. I don't mean to put them on a spot or get them involved in an argument but they have certain factual data concerning these developments that will certainly implement discussion and bring about a better understanding of their interpretation of economic factors and situations.

The specific suggestion which I would like to make is that economic outlook for timber products be given a prominent position in the outlook conferences. We are being put on a rather hot spot in this State by farmers and timber producers for information concerning the outlook for all timber and timber products including turpentine and gum naval stores. As a matter of fact, I am going into a county the first part of January and that is the information which I have been specifically requested to bring and we don't have much, to be frank with you.

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In my opinion, the main way in which the outlook conference can be further improved as far as subject matter is concerned, concerns the family living outlook. I have a feeling that the folks in the family living group spend too much of their energies on situations, reporting studies of what a small group of people eat, what clothes they buy and what clothes they have. These are really home management studies and don't deal with the outlook. For example, we have had to draw mainly on the agricultural chart book for our charts to use for family living. We have also had to do a good deal of our own family living outlook analysis here at home. I talked some with the folks in the Bureau of Home Economics and Human Nutrition about this and I realize they are reluctant to push into the family living outlook field. Although I realize there are a great many problems involved, I



still am not convinced that it is an impossibility. I would like an opportunity to take this up some more with you folks sometime before the next outlook conference is called.

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I agree in general with the suggestions in item I of the digest of replies but I would suggest that major emphasis be placed on the analysis behind the report. After all, we can read the report but it is difficult for us to use some of the material without knowing why that particular position was taken.

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I would be especially interested in seeing more time devoted to the discussion of the general economic situation. It would be helpful to have the views of representatives of other agencies such as the Department of Commerce and possibly to have at least one outstanding economist who isn't connected with any Government agency.

In view of the fact that far more States are holding their State meetings prior to the annual conference it would seem to me that we might spend more time on the long-time outlook and particularly some of the background material that has implication in the outlook. In other words, to make it more and more a training session on which to base our regular outlook throughout the year.

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I would like to see a little more time given to international aspects which influence outlook in an important way and obtain speakers who have made foreign contacts if possible. We could also include more on long-time changes of a fundamental nature which might involve changes in techniques of production processing or marketing which are not in full effect but on the horizon. Such things as health factors, labor saving equipment, developments in processing, shifts in population, etc.

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I would like to go along with a suggestion on general sessions pertaining to home economics. The historical changes in diets and living standards is good if projected in the future, but it seems to me that too much time was spent on historical changes and not enough as to what is expected in the future.

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The object of these meetings I believe does and should include further training of specialists not only in presenting and using outlook information but also in evaluation of the national outlook statements for application to conditions in the many States, adapting outlook material to special situations, and revising his outlook statements as changes in conditions are evident. Such training being a part of the objective, some changes in presentation of outlook might be in order perhaps to include more of the factual basis used by the specialists in Washington in analyzing the situation and perhaps to include more of the logic used in reaching their conclusions. Special opportunities in this direction may exist in each of the commodity sessions.



There is considerable interest among farmers in intermediate and long-range outlook, particularly for those commodities where many farm management decisions must be made to cover a period of years - fruit being an excellent example. It might be desirable to have sessions limited to the longer-range outlook for certain types of farming. Perhaps these discussions should be later in the week than the discussions of the year ahead.

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My suggestions deal with omissions more than commissions. In our work here, we need outlook charts on peanuts and forest products. We need the type of outlook charts that appear in Marketing Research Report 16, "Peanuts and Their Uses for Food," BAE, 1952, on pages 5, 39, and 44. We need this same type of information for pulpwood, dimension lumber, veneer, and a few of the other forestry items.

I would like to see the rural living chart book and program get more into the economics of family living and the outlook for family living rather than the level of family living. We have had far too much talk about the idea that every farm family should produce their own food supplies and not enough information about per capita use of foods, their supplies, and outlook for prices.

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In my opinion, the suggestions, in their order of importance, made in the digest of replies which you included with your letter, are listed below:

- .Greater recognition of regional differences in major commodity situations.
- Greater emphasis on the direction and magnitude of prospective changes from prices current at outlook time, rather than treated on an indefinite basis.
- Consideration of the farm management implications of the commodity situations.

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A little more emphasis on the longer-time outlook should be helpful to those of us in the States doing farm and home planning work.

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Commodity sessions: Continue much as they have been conducted. Highlight effects on farm income. We are getting more and more requests for more detailed outlook information. For crops such as barley the outlook for both malting and feed should be stressed. The same is true for wheat - give outlook for bread wheats, etc.

General sessions: Put strong emphasis on demand and supply factors. Push the analysis as far into the future as possible. Keep information on a broad scope - world, general business, and agriculture.

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One thing that I would like to see. if it could be arranged is more



commodities that are of concern to only two or three States, such as dry peas or hops, but more of commodities like dry beans, onions, and other commodities of that kind that are of concern to many areas, but are not important enough to justify spending time on them in general sessions. If such sessions are held it would have to be organized well in advance and stated clearly on the mimeographed program. Otherwise we would have the same thing happen that happened to the session arranged for sugar this past year. Only one or two people would show up and there would be no session.

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In our own case, I think the most important contribution is probably the information which is developed in the general sessions. These, I hope, will always remain a very large and important part of the conference. It is my feeling that representatives from the States should be thoroughly trained in economics and thoroughly familiar with their own State so that they can make many of the applications of the meeting of the general session in terms of the special situations in their States. If the other emphasis were predominate, you would approach a situation where the State representatives would simply act as a sounding board for information provided at the Federal level. I do not believe that this was ever the purpose or should be the goal of the annual outlook conference.

#### Presentation of Material

Perhaps some time could be saved by eliminating the reading of prepared talks. Formal presentations on the over-all outlook on the first day were well justified, but on the following days the formal presentations of prepared talks could be eliminated. Copies of these could be distributed prior to the meetings and total time could be devoted to discussion.

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Some years those who have presented the outlook for commodities suggested that all present could read the commodity situation and get the anticipated general direction of movement. I feel that more emphasis on the factors which determine commodity anticipation is desirable. Those who discuss the general economic situation do a good job of discussing the effects of the various basic factors.

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General sessions: I agree almost in total with the suggestions on general sessions made in the above-mentioned digest. Obviously the success of these sessions depend upon the quality of talent that can be procured from higher levels and their ability to present their subject matter in an orderly, well-organized, and effective manner.

Commodity sessions: I largely agree with the suggestions made regarding commodity sessions and especially the one that suggests greater consideration of farm management implications in the Commodity Situation Reports and discussions. I do not agree with the last suggestion, namely, to have fewer persons on the panels. I believe that the panel discussions have been very effective and do not in any way discourage audience participation.



The experts tell us that the human can absorb much more by using two senses rather than one, therefore, I believe it is sound to have copies of all prepared statements in the hands of the audience as far in advance as possible in order that participants cannot only listen to the speaker with his sense of hearing but use his sense of sight by following the manuscript. This also gives the participant a chance to make marginal notes all of which aids in the process of assimilation. This latter point may seem trivial but for me it is tremendously important as a means of stepping up the amount of information and aids I can absorb in the limited time available.

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If the reports were mimeographed and made available in advance of the meetings either a week before or the day before, possibly time in meeting could be taken for discussion or comments from the States rather than just the reading of a full report - or perhaps the report by the leader could be five minutes with stress on the principal points - then opening for discussion. The difficulty here is that the group is a little large for this.

Possibly it would be more interesting if no papers were read. Certainly the speaker can remember the highlights. As several said, we can read the papers for details. There is always the possibility some would not. However, I would not write an outlook report without reading them.

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A suggestion I would like to make is if those presenting the summary of commodity highlights would make those available to those attending before they were read, they would have more meaning and we would be able to check the things that we questioned as they were gone over. Still better, I think it would be desirable for the reports to be used to talk from instead of being read. I know this is almost impossible in some cases, but it would be much better if it could be done.

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Distribution of the prepared statements before rather than after the oral presentation may relieve the speaker of reading the statement to us. It certainly would place the audience in a much better position to ask questions and participate in discussions.

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Speeches made in the general sessions not be read. Mimeographed copies of speeches be sent out upon request after the conference is over.

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The major improvement I would suggest in the program itself would be in the nature of speakers. I am referring to their lack of ability to say "yes" or "no." For example, in the fats and oils conference, several questions were put to the speakers concerning the probable trends in the peanut price situation. They did not indicate the direction of the price movement or their opinion of the relative changes in the



price movement for this commodity. There are other examples of this type of presentation which I think could be improved.

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In those sessions where short summaries of the commodity situations are read by the speaker, I feel that copies of these summaries should be made available to the audience before the session begins, instead of afterwards, as has been the case in most instances in the past.

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I am convinced we get much more out of the outlook conference with the short snappy statements by one of the Bureau's staff and a thorough discussion by the panel members. I am sure there should be more discussion from the floor. It seems that only a few are ready to express themselves. Perhaps a request from those who prepare the program for three or four State men to be ready to discuss a certain enterprise.

Time of Conference

To me the outlook conference came just at the right time this year. I prefer to have it a week or so earlier than has been the case in recent years, because we like to put on our outlook training schools in November just before Thanksgiving. This gives us an opportunity to get the job done without the extreme rush of piling the material and writing up our discussion guides such as we have experienced in other years when the conference came the first week in November.

We put on a special outlook program in cooperation with the animal husbandry folks in September; but I am convinced that along with the other States here in the Midwest who do that, we'll have to develop our own material in that area rather than trying to pull in the whole U.S.D.A. conference to fit our particular situation. Holding it in late October such as it was held this year gives you folks the opportunity of using accurate material regarding crop prospects for the year and get a better idea of 1953 prospects than you could earlier. So I would vote to leave the time exactly the same as it was this year. (Another reason for leaving it at this time that we drive in every year and the weather usually is a little better than it is a couple of weeks later.)

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We generally hold our outlook meetings just preceding or during the time that farmers are making plans for the coming year. October or early November would be suitable to us for the outlook conference in Washington.

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Time of conference: I realize that it is impossible to satisfy everyone on this score but personally feel that from the standpoint of timing for the country as a whole the last week in October is the most logical time. I believe this was the consensus of the group which met at the outlook conference last October and I agree with this majority.

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As you well know, it would be helpful if the conference could be held in September, but since that seems to be quite impractical we would be quite content if the materials prepared for the conference could be sent to us just as soon as each segment is prepared. A copy of the outlook charts would be equally helpful and would be welcome even in galley proof form. If the rough draft of the commodity statements could be sent to the State leader in outlook, it would help him in preparing the State materials and also would give him a chance to constructively criticize the National Report and contribute to the final issue. At present we can only take the National Report for what it is worth and use it accordingly.

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I would like to go on record as favoring the month of November rather than October for the conference.

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Further on in the same digest under general comments I would like to say that I am thoroughly in agreement with Dr. Wells that the conference should be as late as possible. Therefore, I would go along with any suggested change of date which would be later than October and I would certainly feel that anything earlier would not be nearly as useful.

#### Regional Sessions

From my point of view the time spent on the regional meetings could be spent to better advantage. We are in the western region, but many of our crops and problems do not fit into this area discussion.

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In 1952 compared with 1951 there was more discussion on implications of outlook to practical farm problems and it seemed to improve the regional meeting that I attended.

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Regional sessions: I disagree with most of the suggestions made on regional sessions in the Digest. I believe that the regional sessions can be made very productive and that the approach should be made on the basis of the farm and home as a unit. Both men and women must participate.

During the last half of last fall's session for the northeast group a farm and home model was presented as the basis for discussing necessary adjustments. The first part of our program was much less productive than the latter part which was conducted on the case method basis. In other words, I believe that the case method approach can be most effectively employed for regional sessions. This does not mean that this type of meeting would be less work for those responsible for the planning and conduct of the meeting. Indeed it would, no doubt, mean more planning and preparation than any other type of meeting.

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I feel that the afternoon devoted to the regional discussion could be used much more profitably in the discussion of the general situation and particularly giving us more of the background material in our long-time outlook work.

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The only comment that I want to make pertains to the regional sessions and to the extension methods sessions. I would like to suggest that these be combined and perhaps as much as one full day allotted to this phase of the outlook program.

I particularly liked the idea of devoting an afternoon to a discussion of outlook information for regional use, and, if this session could be continued for another half-day period in which methods and procedures on a regional basis could be brought in, I believe it would be very helpful to those of us who have had only limited experience in outlook work.

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I felt that the regional session for representatives from the Southern States was very good this past year. This type of session is well worthwhile as we all need to study and find out more about how to help farm families apply outlook in making decisions.

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Joint regional sessions: I like them but believe they repeat what has been said too much. They should relate outlook to regional adjustment for current year and long run. Use of "example" farms as a means of indicating adjustments could be used to encourage discussion, etc.

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The sectional meetings are most valuable as we can discuss those commodities from that particular area. I didn't feel we had time enough for the north central group session.

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As to the regional session, I would like to see information presented on crops and livestock, pertinent to the region, that is not presented during the general conference. For instance, such things as sugar beets, dry beans, seed crops and wool could be discussed for the western region.

#### General Comments

I am wondering about the feasibility of holding special meetings to discuss the economic conditions surrounding certain agricultural products. I am thinking particularly of lettuce; a large portion of which is produced in Arizona and California. It would appear to me that it might be profitable to hold a meeting of the individuals interested in the marketing and outlook of the product somewhere in the area where the product is produced in order that they may become more familiar with the problems involved in the production and marketing of lettuce, or the commodity in question.

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From my point of view I think that it would be highly desirable to leave the last day of the conference free so that those attending the conference from distant points could have the opportunity of visiting Department personnel and other offices on specific problems. As you remember, I stayed over until Monday in order to do this, and I found that it was a very worthwhile procedure.

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I want you to know that we are finding the film strip especially useful and valuable in the outlook training meetings which we are holding now with our county and home demonstration agents. We wish to thank you for this very valuable visual aid.

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I think the idea of using the name cards and the trend toward fewer persons on the panel is most constructive.

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The visual aids prepared and used in 1952 were very good and I think we need more assistance on technique and procedure.

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Representation at the conference: I believe a great deal would be added to the conference if at least one research worker from each State could be invited to attend. This would help to maintain and improve the working relationships and integration of research and extension work which is so badly needed especially at the State level in many States. I also believe that it would be healthy to encourage greater representation from allied industries, farm organizations and the agricultural press if this can be arranged without technical difficulties. Extension workers have the problem of maintaining cooperative working relationships with these groups and to have them participate in discussions at the national level would be of considerable help.

General comments: The U.S.D.A. people have done a fine job in conducting past outlook conferences and I believe they should be continued much on the same basis. I do not object to at least two evening sessions. I would appreciate having at least two free evenings during the week. The exhibits are excellent and should be continued and further developed.

It is indeed a problem to conduct the methods session to the satisfaction of all but it is an important session and should not be dropped. It should be continued with greater effort channeled towards its success. I have considered the feasibility of dividing the group into the older members and the younger members as their needs are somewhat different. However, there is probably much more to be gained by the two groups working together mutually. The older people need the ideas of the younger people, and the younger people no doubt need the counsel and ideas of the older people.

I think the last suggestion, namely, "to have each State prepare a page on their procedures to be compiled into a booklet for dissemination among outlook workers" would be a good one. This could be dis-



tributed at the beginning of the week so that all State workers would have a chance to study it before the Friday session. Then perhaps this subject of procedures could be considered on a discussion basis at the Friday morning session.

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The color film was much appreciated and I thought helped materially in the outlook talks.

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The biggest advantage, I think, from the annual outlook conference is training of new workers who haven't been there before. The value of this is beyond measurement, as far as I am concerned. I think it should be encouraged by the Federal Extension Service that those attending from the States should be rotated from year to year. To me, it was actually a training school - one of the best I have ever attended.

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I suggest that people be seated during general sessions between speeches only; that loud speakers be installed for the rural family living panels; that the men and women meet together to discuss use of outlook material back home.

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In helping us prepare for the annual outlook publication and annual meetings, it might be helpful if we could have some idea in July or August of the types of new charts to be included in the chart book.

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If it is at all possible, further progress may be made in the following ways:

1. To provide data more quickly on Monthly Prices and Volume.
2. Reduce discussional materials which are apparently available through the public news reports.
3. Provide weekly average prices of the cash and futures markets on (a) soybean meal, (b) cottonseed meal, (c) cotton, (d) butter, and (e) eggs.
4. Prepare a list of suggestive (not suggested) adjustments that may be made in light of the outlook.

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As mentioned in our discussion at the time of the outlook conference, I feel that a folder should be set up for each individual attending the conference and a copy of the various talks should be placed in this folder so that these could either be mailed to the extension worker or picked up by him to take home at the end of the conference. This would prevent the individual from having to scurry around trying to get copies of each talk after it is presented.

I also am of the opinion that the small rooms with a very limited seating capacity such as were used for several of the commodity sessions during the 1952 conference, are a mistake.



My last comment would be regarding the home demonstration meetings. In my particular case, and I surmise that others are in the same situation, I am the only one attending the conference from this State. Therefore, I am held responsible for bringing back the outlook information for the family living and home use people. Very few of the reports, as made at these home use sessions, were made available to us and, therefore, I was unable to supply our home demonstration people with information as to what was discussed in many of the separate sessions. I suggest that short summaries of these be drawn up and made available to all individuals present at the conference.

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I do not want to imply that the agricultural session held on Friday morning for a discussion of State outlook materials and their use was not worthwhile. The program at this session was excellent. However, I believe it would be of more practical value if this discussion could be held on a regional basis. This would not preclude having a speaker from another region or State to present to the group successful methods that were being used effectively for doing outlook work in other States.

While the session on extension methods was good this past year, I do feel that it could perhaps be improved by discussing only the new and outstanding methods and techniques being used by the different States. As already suggested by someone else, it might be well to have each State prepare a brief statement on their procedures to be summarized into a report for distribution among outlook workers.

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An early appraisal of the livestock situation would help us meet the demands of our feeders for September meetings.

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There may be some merit to the suggestion to decentralize the outlook conference. I am sure that if this were to be accomplished it would at the same time raise a number of problems for the Department, therefore I would say I would be happy to go along either as is or decentralized.

I would agree with "eliminating all evening sessions except the banquet" except that I would want you to then provide some place during the day-time sessions where the men could get together for their traditional Monday night get-acquainted session. Also some time should be provided whereby participants could make contacts in the Department and attend to other miscellaneous business.

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You might be interested in my obtaining 100 sets of 20 selected slides for county agents and Smith Hughes teachers. These are all gone and we are obtaining more. Everyone has expressed a favorable reaction to this service.

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The slides we obtain at the conference are indispensable and when using them in the counties they present a better picture of outlook than anything we can say or present. There are, however, a few slides that have too much information on them. If the information on those particular slides could be put on separate slides they would be much more effective.

